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KSUM, JM, XL

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: PROMINENT FIGURES ADVOCATE CARIBBEAN AGENDA FOR
UPCOMING FIFTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS (SOA)

REF: (A) KINGSTON 167 (041610Z MAR 09)
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Summary

1.(U) At the launch of the newly established Roxborough Institute, prominent figures urge Caribbean leaders to speak with one regional voice and to seek immediate liquidity support to weather the global economic storm at the upcoming Fifth Summit of the Americas (SOA).
End Summary.

"Caribbean Agenda for the SOA"

2.(U) The respected Member-of-Parliament (MP) for East Central St. Andrews and former Minister of National Security in the previous People's National Party (PNP) government, Dr. Peter Phillips, launched his newly established Roxborough Institute in a well-attended public forum on "The Caribbean Agenda for the Summit of the Americas" on the evening of March 25. Featured speakers included:

-- former CARICOM Secretary General and economist Sir Alister McIntyre;

-- Professor Don Robotham of New York City University;

-- financial analyst and editorialist Keith Collister;

-- Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CaPRI) President and editorialist Dr. John Rapley.

(Note: former Barbadian Prime Minister Owen Arthur also had been scheduled to participate, but was unable to be present.)

Roxborough Institute: a "non-sectarian, non-partisan grouping...against the background of a severe crisis"

3.(U) In welcoming remarks, Phillips underscored his intention that the newly-formed Roxborough Institute should be a "non-sectarian, non-partisan grouping which wishes to stimulate a dialogue around Jamaica's (and the Caribbean's) development options in all its facets. We seek through seminars, discussion groups, lectures and publications to engage the widest possible participation of persons interested in creating a more equitable, secure, peaceful, and culturally expressive society...Roxborough Institute is being formed

with a view to stimulating a public debate about the future of Jamaican nationhood. This desire comes against the background of a severe crisis which in some quarters is seen as threatening the very survival of the Jamaican State."

SOA: "an opportunity for Caribbean views to be taken into account"

4.(U) Phillips then noted that the Fifth SOA would be the first such meeting in the Caribbean, coming on the heels of the G-20 meetings in London and preceding the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Port-of-Spain, and called it "an opportunity for Caribbean views to be taken into account." He outlined three "sets of issues" that should be addressed at the SOA:

-- seeking solutions to the economic crisis which will protect social gains;

-- Caribbean interest in a long-term integrated financial architecture;

-- and social issues such as education, training, crime, drugs, and migration.

Political Implications of Economic Crisis "Extraordinarily Serious"

5.(U) Robotham painted an ominous picture of the impact of the global economic crisis on the Caribbean, recalling that the global crash of 1929 eventually had led to large-scale riots in Jamaica in 1938. He decried the "passivity of the developing world" as

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wealthier nations set the global agenda, and warned of the dangers of the current high level of unemployment, particularly among youth: "it would be foolhardy to think that an economic and financial crisis of this depth and duration could only have economic consequences...the political implications are extraordinarily serious." He predicted that Jamaica soon would be forced to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and called for expansion and extension of the IMF's "Vulnerability Fund" to heavily indebted middle-income countries (HIMICs)."

"Muddling Through" Not An Option This Time

6.(U) Collister noted that for decades Jamaica had managed to "muddle through" various financial, economic, political, and social crises, but then warned pointedly that, this time, an attempt simply to "muddle through" would lead to disaster. Over four decades, the country had failed to diversify its economy, grow the productive sector, and become self-reliant. An additional social safety net now would be necessary to replace dwindling remittances from abroad. He called for a "gateway strategy" to integrate large-scale investment from the Far East aimed at North and South America, and the formation of new industries, such as hospitals to provide high-quality, low-cost health care to Americans.

SOA: an opportunity for Caribbean to speak "with a coordinated regional voice"

7.(U) Rapley maintained that the Caribbean had fallen off the agenda of first world countries like the USA and UK, leaving Canada as the only large country showing increased interest in the region. He viewed the SOA as an opportunity for Caribbean leaders to speak "with a coordinated regional voice." He expected "no breakthroughs," but saw the SOA as a chance for the Caribbean to "send coordinated signals" and "articulate a regional message." He said Caribbean leaders needed to approach the U.S. Congress with a clear plan on the issues on which it wants cooperation and support.

SOA: "Deliberative Meeting" Rather Than "Negotiation"

8.(U) Finally, McIntyre reminded the audience that the SOA was not a "negotiation," but rather a "deliberative meeting." He said the IMF and World Bank had "neglected" the middle-income countries (MICs), and that Jamaica would need further liquidity support to finance its upcoming budget. He called for international monetary reform, defense of the Caribbean's offshore financial sector, a "new dialogue on migration," and closer cooperation with the USA on environmental matters.

9.(SBU) When asked how the Roxborough Institute would convey its views and advice to the Government of Jamaica (GoJ) in advance of the SOA, Phillips assured the audience that the evening's forum would be well documented and publicized, and its recommendations conveyed to the GoJ - but did not specify how. ((Comment: Despite having lost a challenge for the presidency of the PNP to the charismatic Leader of the Opposition Portia Simpson Miller (PSM)(reftel B), Phillips commands considerable respect among the ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) government and across the political spectrum. The extent to which his Roxborough Institute may directly influence the GoJ's positions at the SOA is unclear, but the views expressed at the forum were generally in consonance with those of Prime Minister Bruce Golding and SOA Coordinator Amb. Paul Robothom (reftel A). Whether, in Jamaica's intensely tribal, partisan, and occasionally violent political culture, the new Institute can long endure as a "non-sectarian, non-partisan grouping" remains to be seen. End Comment.))

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